

COVID-19 has had a major impact on how our community partner, The Community Builders, serves the community of Avondale. The Community Builders primarily functions as a non-profit housing organization, but also work to support neighborhood wellness via a variety of different campaigns encouraging healthy lifestyle choices including tobacco cessation and stress reduction. With the onset of the pandemic, many of these operations which often involved social events, lost priority and COVID-19 based support has taken precedence. These events have been made difficult to operate with social distancing, exacerbated by community wi-fi access being relegated to community buildings. As a housing association, The Community Builders' COVID-19 support has focused primarily on eviction prevention but has also included other forms of community outreach and support. Many of their resources have been shifted towards ensuring food access for their residents, working with the residents of Avondale to safely quarantine if they are found to be positive for COVID-19, and providing support for students and parents with the abrupt switch to remote learning. Avondale has faced problems pertaining to food access and stable housing prior to COVID-19, however with COVID-19, these challenges now provide more of an immediate and pressing concern.

The Community Builders also emphasize resources in terms of staff time. There is an inherent increase in staff time focused towards these new priorities in the face of COVID-19, which creates a logistical gap in the ability to continue important programs, such as the aforementioned tobacco cessation and stress management plans. In concept, The Community Builders remains committed to addressing disparities by empowering their residents, primarily through social cohesion, education and advocacy in the form of procuring access to resources and social capital that can be provided to the community. It cannot be understated that within the context of COVID-19, The Community Builders have been responding out of necessity. To reiterate, the aforementioned programs that have lost priority are still large and pressing challenges to be overcome, eschewed due to resource not importance. The inequities experienced by the Avondale community have been, as noted by our contact within the organization, been highlighted in a backdrop of COVID-19. The challenges of food access and stable housing not only remain, but are now complicated, as the new parameters of living for residents both increases the number of people facing these issues, as well as increases the potential negative consequences of inadequate provisions provided for these residents. Residents who face eviction for example, now also would have to contend with an inability to have space and supplies to ensure proper quarantining, on top of pre-existing risk factors related to homelessness, just to name an example. These are increased risks that are worth noting, result of COVID-19 considerations as well, such as an inability to work required hours, or at worse job elimination. This two-sided amplification in effect of disparities within the community, makes it tantamount that organizations such as The Community Builders remain supported in closing the gap of resources to Avondale, and to communities like Avondale.

In our initial discussions with our community partner, The Community Builders, before COVID, a lack of social cohesion was identified as an issue that the community faced. In light of the strict quarantining and social distancing related to COVID, opportunities to bolster social cohesion were significantly reduced. Normal community events such as the monthly community dinners hosted by The Community Builders and other events aimed at bringing the Avondale

community together could not take place. When such opportunities were no longer available and residents were asked to avoid social gatherings, it is easy to see how there was not an opportunity to improve social cohesion and how the feelings of isolation and a lack of support that many residents may experience were intensified. This isolation in a community lacking social cohesion in an unprecedented pandemic was, and continues to be, a significant challenge to the Avondale community.

Like many other communities, the families of Avondale were faced with the cessation of in-person education at schools early on in the COVID pandemic. As a result, it is likely that many students no longer had access to certain resources that were provided by their schools. Barriers to these resources, such as computer access, may have posed difficulty in the transition to virtual learning for many students and impacted the quality of their education. In addition, students also missed out on opportunities to socialize at school, which could have had a negative effect on the social cohesion in the community.

As we learned from TCB, many of their Avondale residents do not own cars and therefore, are reliant on public transportation to travel to grocery stores, places of work, and healthcare visits. Throughout much of the early part of the COVID-19 pandemic, Cincinnati Metro buses were running on reduced schedules. This change forced Cincinnati residents to either forego their trips altogether, or take less convenient, longer, and more circuitous trips to their destinations. This surely had far-reaching impacts on Avondale residents' lives by limiting access to healthcare, fresh produce and groceries, and jobs that these residents depended on to support their families.

COVID-19 has also significantly impacted the working environment for Avondale residents. Many local businesses have closed due to reduced traffic, and businesses that remain open were forced to lay-off staff or push for working from home. As residents involved with our community partner are primarily low-income, they are placed at a higher risk for being laid off or furloughed which is critical as many have children and a family for whom they are responsible. Additionally, working from home is difficult for these residents given lack of access to technology, e.g. laptops/local computers - many of our residents found such access at public libraries which accessing also became difficult due to COVID-19 restrictions. For residents who still have work, it forces them to go on-site which 1.) poses a danger to their health as well as their family 2.) is difficult as many residents rely on public transportation (which access has been limited to as described above) and 3.) holds significant health risks given limited access/income to purchase PPE.

A variety of modalities exist for current providers and future physicians to provide support for the needs of our communities related to the impact of COVID-19. In terms of direct engagement, health care providers and learners can participate in volunteer services to supplement the work already being done by The Community Builders and other community partners. In Avondale specifically, volunteers are needed to participate in monthly produce pop-ups addressing the lack of access to healthy food options exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Other needs that could be directly addressed include the organization and hosting of drives for items in high demand but short supply in the Avondale community, again related to

the increase of existing need related to pandemic response changes. The Community Builders are lacking man-power and resources to take on such projects in addition to their numerous current programs. The needs of the community currently exceed their capacity to fully intervene, and volunteers that can augment their mission via guided partnership would make a tangible impact.

In addition to direct engagement, health care providers and learners are particularly equipped to address the opportunities that exist within The Community Builders for contributions to community education via development of social media content related to COVID-19 health literacy. Social media can also be used as a tool to amplify the voices and needs of underserved communities, and spread awareness of resources available to those experiencing increased pandemic related difficulties. As advocates for patients and influencers in the community, leveraging social media and other professional network connections to attract attention and resources to those most acutely effected by exacerbated disparities in social determinants of health can make a significant difference.

Based on The Community Builder's ongoing engagement with the Avondale community, they specifically request advocacy for resource allocation towards housing stability initiatives. They are deeply concerned about a rise in the number of evictions when the current eviction moratorium is lifted. It nearly goes without saying that community wide health is negatively impacted on multiple levels by a dramatic rise in homelessness. Thus, this should be a shared priority among the healthcare population and community outreach organizations. Related efforts by The Community Builders to empower the community in a sustainable manner include the establishment of wealth building programs and resource allocation directly benefiting black residents who are disproportionately affected by COVID-19 in terms of health outcomes and economic devastation. These areas are also desperately in need of advocacy and funding. Further, The Community Builders believes that philanthropy organizations in general should be encouraged to allow for unrestricted use of dollars going directly to community residents who will then be empowered to more effectively meet their specific needs. Lastly, physicians and learners should not forget to continue advocacy for programs enhancing food access and economic self-sufficiency within Avondale, which have been long-term goals of The Community Builders and have been especially impeded by the current circumstances related to COVID-19.

